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LOUIS BOTHA: BOER AND BRITON

On May 31, 1902, in the presence of the joint representatives of the British and Boer governments, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed. When the last name had been written Lord Kitchener rose and held out his hand to General Botha. "We are good friends now," he said. It was Great Britain speaking to South Africa. Though Botha's answer is unrecorded, his actions since have proved how fully he endorsed that statement, for at this moment of her need, Great Britain has no son more deeply loyal or more widely worthy than this man who, born under an alien flag, was in former years her bitter foe. It was he who, but a few months since, crushed out rebellion in the Transvaal and Cape states. It was he who conquered for His Majesty, George V, Germany's South-West possession in the Dark Continent, comprising a territory of 320,000 square miles. It is as certain as is to-day the present fact that it will be this same staunch imperialist and sane statesman who will stand shoulder to shoulder with those foremost few who will soon be putting forth united efforts in the reconstruction of the "All-Red" Empire in answer to new needs.

It is but a short fifteen years ago that this Louis Botha was desperately fighting the Empire he now upholds. When peace was declared he laid down his sword, unsheathed and even against his better judgment. None the less on these accounts was he wise enough and big enough to act a Briton as well as a Boer in cementing the bond of harmony between the races. Fine were both the spirit and the words with which in the Colonial Parliament, at the present war's commencement, he moved a resolution supporting England. "We form to-day," said this ex-foeman, "part of the British Empire; we are an ally of the British Empire; and that Empire being involved in war, South Africa is, *ipso facto*, also involved in war with the enemy. There are only two possibilities. The one possibility is of faith, duty and honor. The other is dishonor and disloyalty."

In these ringing phrases, this champion of "faith, duty and honor" sounded the keynote of his own individuality. He is

distinctly magnetic, but it is a magnetism that springs from heart rather than intellect. The instant verdict is that he is to be trusted without reserve.

Three days after the British Government had issued its declaration of war against the Central Powers it "invited" the administration of the South African Union to "seize such part of German South-West Africa as will give command of Swakopmund, Luderitzbucht, and the wireless stations there or in the interior." Three more days sufficed for the answer that General Botha and his colleagues "cordially agreed" to do this. On the one side was no command, on the other no hesitation. And when Botha gave it out that he was going to take the field, the scenes of enthusiasm were remarkable. He called up thirty-five Dutch officers who had served with him in the Boer war, and told them he wanted fifteen to march against Germany under his orders; they were to decide among themselves which should go and which should stay. Five minutes talk sufficed. When the general returned he was told: "Take whatever fifteen you want. The other twenty intend to go anyway, as privates." What cannot one do with men like that!

By Christmas day the Union forces were masters of Walfisch Bay. In another fortnight they had seized Swakopmund, thus securing the only practicable harbors and closing the eight hundred miles of coast which was the invaded territory's only outlet to the sea and to Europe. To the north were the pro-Entente Portuguese. Inland lay the British protectorate of Bechuanaland. To the south, the Orange River and the pitiless onset of Botha's three columns. By the middle of May, Windboek, the capital, had handed over its keys. By the end of June the last German flag had been hauled down in a rich and promising territory of a third of a million square miles.

On the side of the invaders the casualties were, relatively, a mere handful, thanks to the all but incredible celerity of their movements, and to the infallible perfection of their commissariat, equipment, and preparation,—all the work of General Smuts, till yesterday in charge of the British operations in German East Africa, Berlin's last foothold in the continent. When Botha received the submission of the German governor,

that gentleman could scarcely believe that his victorious opponents had come through such physical hardships,—across such vast deserts of drifting sands, with the wayside wells choked or poisoned,—with only 113 deaths and 318 wounded. Where is there another such record, as successful and so rapid, of campaigning in a sub-tropical, semi-barbarous country?

Amazing thing, though, is that the expedition has won no more widespread recognition than it has. It was a triumphant vindication of the good faith of the Dutch. It was a finally convincing endorsement of the political wisdom which has given South Africa autonomy so soon after the war with the Burghers had closed. It proved that the British colonies are amply capable of mastering, of and by themselves, the difficult art of modern warfare. It stamped Botha as one of the great pioneer-soldiers in all history.

As the General moves to and fro among guests, at any of the democratic receptions, given from time to time in the official residence at Pretoria or in the family mansion at Johannesburg, his build, carriage, and rugged countenance, with thick heavy moustache, all are reminiscent of dashing Phil Sheridan. When he stops to speak, the blue, clear, honest eyes, blending fire of action with dreaminess of abstraction and ideals, look straight at one without flinching. Then, in a moment, a sunny gleam comes into them, the mobile, pleasant mouth relaxes, and the whole face bursting into a rippling smile becomes that of one who wants to be on good terms with life and people. Then the hero of Winchester steps aside in favor of Thackeray's Major Dobbin, concerning whom the author of *Vanity Fair* writes, "His thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good, his life was honest and pure, and his heart warm and humble."

There the simile ends. Botha is far stronger than was Dobbin. He neither loved nor married a distressing Amelia; his wife is a grandniece of Robert Emmet, the illustrious Irish nationalist, and she is strong and amiable, as popular as she is handsome. Perhaps, also, it is worth adding that where Thackeray's Major had "very large hands and feet," those of the African Premier are of less than medium size and well shaped. Rather heavily marked eyebrows, a straight positive nose, slightly double chin,

and dark hair, complete the picture of this well-preserved, attractive man of fifty-three, possessing in happy combination four high gifts: integrity, strength, sentiment, and a keen sense of justice.

Emerson has said that the actual deeds of Washington and Lincoln are not sufficient to account for the reverence in which they are held; the explanation lies deep in the personalities of the two. So it is with this great Boer-Englishman. He is not renowned in oratory or administration, but he is an instinctive, irresistible, inspired conciliator. Never has Boer or Briton been misled by him and the profound confidence of both is his. It is to this that his consummate leadership can be traced.

Botha is not a silent man, neither is he a conversationalist in any "brilliant" sense of the term. As easily familiar with the English language as with his native jargon, he delights to talk to men of ideas and draw them out. Like many of those before him who have left their marks upon the world's history, he has lived close to both nature and to books, and one cannot be long in his society without noting the effective part such potent councillors have played in shaping his character.

When at Johannesburg, divorced from the cares of state, hardly a day passes that he does not jump upon his horse, and, accompanied by his boys and eldest daughter, Helen (who resembles the former Miss Alice Roosevelt, in both looks and tastes), ride away into the woods for a day's hunt. After supper, the library is given up to lounging and reading. In a comfortable arm-chair, beside a low lamp, the master-mind of South Africa can generally be found with a favorite volume, the pleasure in selecting which is amply attested to by wide-open doors of cases and scattering of contents upon rugs and chairs. He loves current fiction but is especially fond of Dickens, and is devoted to the poetry of Wordsworth. "Heavier" literature, also, appeals to him, as evidenced by the works in the realms of physical science and psychic research to be seen on the shelves.

There is a distinct atmosphere of romance about Louis Botha. Born of farmer parentage in Greytown, Natal, his original bent was not for the army, although, when a young man, he saw some service as field cornet. Up to 1889 his pursuits were mainly

divided between agriculture and politics, for he was a member of the Transvaal Volksraad for 1897 and of President Kruger's Council just before the outbreak of war with Great Britain. As did America's Washington and Herkimer and England's Cromwell, the future Boer leader came from green fields and pastures to take up, from necessity, a soldier's career.

At first serving in a subordinate capacity, Botha rapidly rose to a command, and at Victoriasburg and Spionkop was General of Division. Subsequently Joubert's death made him Commander-in-Chief of the Transvaal Burghers. His had been one of the votes in Council against Oom Paul's decree that there be a trial of strength with England, but, when the majority ruled in favor of the master and the die was cast, it was the nature of Botha to serve, with whole heart and soul, the cause to which he had become committed. Consequently, it is not surprising to find him, after the surrender of Pretoria to Lord Roberts, in 1900, reorganizing Boer resistance into an effective guerilla warfare which lasted for two years, until the end at Vereeniging.

Strange and dramatic does it seem now, that his able companion in arms throughout this period should have been that sturdy, humorless fanatic De Wet, whom a little more than a decade later he was to pursue and capture as a traitor to the Government they were then both fighting. Strange, too, was it that, struggling to the last, the British General whom he defied should have been Lord Kitchener, and that the great Secretary should have lived long enough to praise his erstwhile foe not only for saving the Empire in Africa but also for substantially adding to it.

Promptly, when fighting ceased to have proper meaning for the welfare of his people, Louis Botha accepted the inevitable, and in 1902 set his signature to the Vereeniging compact, which ever since he has faithfully kept and advanced. Upon the grant of self-government to the Transvaal five years afterwards, the noted Boer was called upon by Lord Selborne to form a ministry, and when in 1910 the Union became an accomplished fact, he was chosen its first Premier, a position still held by him.

As a commander in the field, Botha had proved his strategic genius during the South African War, handicapped and thwarted though he constantly was by older, less farseeing generals. He had proved also that he possessed the qualities essential to a great soldier of indomitable courage, patience, and endurance; he has given no less signal proof of these qualities and of brilliant generalship since. But those who study his career during the last fifteen years will in all likelihood come to the conclusion that it is in the council chamber that his greatest victories have been won, and that as statesman he will play even greater part in the crucial years that will sharply follow this war, than he has done in the fray itself.

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